BRANCH LINE NEWS INTERNATIONAL

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This newsletter covers the world outside the British Isles from information supplied by members.
Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the compilers or of the Society.



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EUROPE

[457] Austria/Slovakia – Electrification Project Completed

Cross-border train services were resumed on the 66 km main line between Wien and Bratislava via Marchegg on 11 October following the completion of electrification, track doubling and upgrading of the line. The €541.3mn project involved track doubling and electrification at 15kV 16.7Hz ac on the 37 km section between Wien Aspern Nord and Marchegg on the Austrian-Slovak border. All level crossings were replaced by underpasses. Stations were modernised to improve accessibility and provide park-and-ride facilities. In addition, the line speed was increased from 120 km/h to 160 km/h. A further increase to 200 km/h is planned when the line is equipped with ERTMS.
Slovak infrastructure manager ŽSR modernised the bridge over the River March on the border at a cost of €11.5mn. The work was delayed several times by flooding and unexpected technical challenges. However, the maximum line speed over the bridge remains at 70 km/h and the 6 km section between Marchegg and Devinska Nová Ves is still single track.

As a result of the upgrade, the journey time from Wien to Bratislava Hlavná has been cut from 1 hour 6 minutes to 56 minutes. Trains run at hourly intervals. Four daily Eurocity trains will be introduced on the route with the start of the 2026 timetable on 14 December 2025.

[458] Belgium – Between Paris and Amsterdam Tours

Rather than go home and go away again a few days later I decided this would be a good chance do some Belgian and Dutch trams getting between them all on cash fares, no Interrail. So after the Paris Grand Ceinture Tour, the next morning I caught a Flix coach to Brussel-Bruxelles. TGVs, even weeks ahead, were pricy and the only Ouigo to give me some time in Bruxelles-Brussel left just after 07:00. So as the coach took only 30 minutes longer and left just before 09:00 I booked that, the fares on both were around €30. Arriving in Brussel-Bruxelles just before 14:00, I got a STIB day ticket for €8.90. Objectives were a rare curve just in use that weekend, three of my four required line ends not yet visited and a long term diversionary use of a connecting line usually with no service; those and other small bits were done OK.

I stayed in Antwerpen allowing two days for my first ever trams there and to Gent where I just had a couple of short rides. Research found SNCB have changed their +65 senior discount system, it's now a reduced fare by distance, and singles only as opposed to a maximum day return fare of [if memory serves me well] €9.90. Bruxelles-Brussel to Antwerpen was €5.50 and searching the machines Oostende to Arlon was €12.50. A bonus is there is now no time restriction. Also new for anyone is a 40% reduced fare offer if you sign up for Train+ for a monthly fee, currently on offer at €2 a month increasing to €6 from January. This is NOT a subscription, but it's midweek morning and evening peak restricted so of no use to me this trip. It even gives discounts against the discounted senior fares.

Re trams, the De Lijn website covers all their networks and simply says a €9 day ticket is valid on "all services". I emailed them to clarify but got no reply, but can confirm my Gent day ticket was accepted by the on board machines in Antwerpen. Their information at stops is useless, displaying only a list of departure times, absolutely nothing as to the calling points, just its normal final destination and all

screens showed the T4 going to the 'Hopital', with no replacement bus from the station before you think of that, really helpful for those unfamiliar with Gent. I genuinely ended up in a turn-back siding by mistake, [all parallel tracks so nothing gained] thanks to the lack of information.

In order to cover some rare NMBS/SNCB track in the Berchem area I started Monday on a €2.50 single Antwerpen Centraal to Lier, for the only train I found booked to arrive into Berchem Platform 4 which meant it must use Line 27A and the grade separated junction on the outskirts of Berchem. I can confirm it took that junction the "correct" way, perhaps fortunately with it being reversible as a passenger train went towards Lier just before the junction and then we passed a southbound freight soon after doing it so "normal" is far from guaranteed. Next was Line 59 from Berchem Platform 2/3 the service has recently doubled with the second pair outbound at xx:24 to Lokeren. This pair reverses in Platform 3 by departing "wrong line" to a crossover at the join of Lines 59 and 59/1 at Y West Berchem.

Then to Gent, it was €8.50 single from Lier, €7.50 back to Antwerpen. My visit was poorly timed as in addition to the known long term closure of a city centre route, the longest branch to the north-west is shut until early 2026, and a one stop branch to the Hopital was unexpectedly shut until Friday. I had still gone as a connecting line done only by depot workings currently has an all-day service, and then found with the Hopital branch closure route, route T4 was turning short at Gent Sint Pieters Station so doing a rare curve there. Doing all I could took almost 5 hours, one part being one of the oddest route happenings seen in a while. Route T4 goes alongside a river lock on a narrow road with only room for one track. To serve nearby stop Muidebrug trams towards the Hopital go round in a large circle and call at the same stop as trams going in the other direction. I obviously hopped off to get the curves only done by a journey going in the other direction and was accompanied by two normals who had caught the tram going in the wrong direction. I had to stop them getting off at Muidebrug and persuade them to stay on when they noticed they had returned to where they had got on.

[459] Belgium/Germany – Tours which *may be routed* via Montzen - Aachen West

(BLNI1480.400) The situation has now been clarified and the only train which is booked to travel via Aachen West and Montzen is the 12:30 departure from Aachen Hauptbahnhof to Eupen (arrive 14:00) on Saturday 13 December. The other three excursion trains are booked to run via Hergenrath.

[460] Czech Republic – Trains Routed via Most Yards

I was travelling on R615 Cheb – Ústí – Praha on Saturday 25 October. Its schedule happened to coincide with one of the departures shown under EGTRE entry CZ25/7 at Most station. Not being in a rush I left my train at Most for a chat with RCAS driver and conductor of Os26806 at platform 4 track 8. They confirmed that they hardly ever get routed through the yard and almost always use the yard's bypass (i.e. through Kopisty platforms without stop). One of them assumed this was mainly for operating convenience (quote "it's just like that"/"je to tak"), one of them was thinking of lower speeds/longer travel time on the yard route.

[461] Denmark – København Tramway Opens

Trams have returned to København after 53 years, with music, family entertainment and a day of free travel marking the opening of the first phase of the Hovedstadens Letbane line on 26 October.

The Hovedstadens Letbane (Capital City Light Rail) line runs 13.1 km around the capital's western suburbs, following the O3 ring road from Ishøj north to Rødovre Nord with 12 stops. Services operate via a 400m branch to Glostrup station with a reversal. The second phase running north from Rødovre to Lyngby and Lundtofte is still under construction and is expected to open in mid-2026. This will take the line to 28 km with 29 stops and provide connections between five S-bane corridors while avoiding the city centre.

Services currently run every 10 minutes; when the second phase opens this will increase to every 5 minutes during the daytime on weekdays. Ridership is predicted to reach 14 million passengers per

year in 2030. Siemens Mobility has supplied 29 Avenio light rail vehicles, which are based at Rødovre Nord depot. The 100% low-floor, four-section steel bodied trams are 36.9m long and 2650mm wide with six double leaf doors per side and a capacity of 258 passengers including 64 seated. There is step-free boarding and level access throughout, with four areas for bicycles, pushchairs and wheelchair users.

The trams have a maximum speed of 70 km/h, and will have an average operating speed of 30 km/h.
A 15-year operations and maintenance contract was awarded to Metro Services, the subsidiary of Milano transport operator ATM which also operates the København metro.

[462] France – A Traveller's Tale Nîmes - Lyon - Paris

There have been various reports of how large airports are coping since the 12 October EU entry changes so here's one with just two pairs of flights total on a Wednesday, Nîmes with Ryanair. Two immigration queues were in operation, diligently separating out EU and add-ons from all other passports. Then two booths, two people in each, 1st took passport, if happy hands it to mate who takes picture, fingerprints and stamped me in. No questions whatsoever were asked. Processed in two minutes but I was one of the first off the plane from reserving the back row so your guess is as good as mine if everyone made it for the only bus, scheduled to depart 20 minutes after booked landing time. [FYI, the bus costs €7 and ends at the Gare SNCF]. So basically, as expected for an off-grid airport and no taxis left when said bus departed with just seven passengers on it.

SNCF: Straight into a power outage at Tarascon-sur-Rhône with up to 2-hour delays on Marseille services, but fortunately I'm heading for Valence on an Ouigo service so unaffected. This trip is not on an IR, so an advance Ouigo was a fair bit cheaper than a TER, even with needing to buy SNCF singles to the TGV stations at each end. Talking of Valence, it was awkward for hotels; there were plenty near the station but all with bad reviews, and Ibis etc. tailored for road traffic and really tricky to get to on foot. Found an OK Hotel across the river in St Paray with four bus routes to it. All that was for getting in position for a Rhone West Bank two required curve diversions, South to West at Saint Rambert D'Ablon and East to North on the west side. The 1st diverted service was through from Avignon departing Valence 10:36 that turned up as one 4-car EMU so wedged but got a seat.

Next was some tram/Metro riding in Lyon, a network of which I had done very little and which has two TSUL entries. Also I didn't know it has a Metro that is partially rack – with Urbanrail claiming one station is on a 17% incline and that it has been extended at the top end onto an SNCF formation. It runs every 10 minutes, was duly done and definitely has a Metro feel to it. Both TSUL entries are off the Airport tram line, so as my Ouigo to Paris was from the Airport TGV station [€28 whereas early evenings from the city were the same digits but the other way round]. One of the TSUL's termini is right by the Olympic Lyonnais stadium amongst other things, but when I checked timings it wasn't running for a few hours late that afternoon, early evening. It turns out that Lyon were playing Basel in the Europa League that evening but it seems bizarre it's suspended when there is a game.

As you may know, the tram to the Airport is an express, skipping most stops and separately fared, €17.50 single, or reduced to €10.50 if you can prove you have a train ticket from the Airport station as it has conductors. It stops at Mayzieu Zi in the suburbs which is where the 2nd TSUL is, but it's still the same fare from there even though it's only one stop to the Airport. In finding that bizarre fact from the SNCF Connect App, it also gave timings for an every 30 minutes number 47 bus to the Airport taking 25 minutes, and that the Airport was in zone 2. The minimum zones you can buy in Lyon for a one-day ticket covers 1 & 2 and costs €6.90 plus €0.20 for a rechargeable card. That will do nicely then.

So on to Paris for a day-ticket worth of wanderings, before hopefully the Grand Ceinture Tour on the following day.

[463] Germany – Rostock Trams (RSAG) - Closure in November 2026

The section of Rostock Tram route 6 (and peak-hours route 3) between Zoo and Neuer Friedhof which crosses the Rostock Hbf – Bad Doberan railway line is to close in November 2026 as the bridge over the railway line is to be demolished - and rebuilt without tram lines. The reason for not reinstating this line is that a new-build extension from Zoo to Reutershagen, all on the north side of the railway line, is planned. So if you need this piece of track, a trip to the Baltic coast is in order sometime in the next 12 months. See: https://www.tram-west.de/

[464] Germany – Wuppertalbahn Santa Specials

The popular St. Nicholas train rides on the Wuppertalbahn will be back again in 2025. This year, the train will travel from Elberfeld (Hauptbahnhof), Barmen, and Oberbarmen to Beyenburg. There will be a total of 10 trips over the three days. Secure your tickets and join us! St. Nicholas will be there too. Of course, he's already prepared a surprise for the young passengers! Ticket sales have begun. €15 bookable online with credit/debit card. More information and booking details are available here: 05.-07.12.2025 – NIKOLAUSFAHRTEN in Wuppertal – Willkommen auf der Wuppertalbahn!

[465] Germany/The Netherlands – 'Wunderline' Re-opening Delayed Another Six Months

The opening of the new River Ems bridge between Ihrhove and Weener on the Leer (DE) to Groningen (NL) line, to be known as the 'Wunderline' has been deferred yet again, from a previously-announced firm date of 14 December 2025 to a vague 'Summer 2026', which will be over ten-and-a-half years since the previous structure was destroyed by a ship collision on 03 December 2015.
https://www.deutschebahn.com/de/presse/presse-regional/pr-hamburg-de/aktuell/presseinformationen-regional/Zugverkehr-auf-der-Wunderline-Groningen-Bremen-erst-im-Sommer-2026--13583816

[466] Greece – Αίγιο - Κιάτο (Aegio - Kiato) and Πάτρα (Patra) Suburban

Planning to travel from Patra to Athina as much as possible by train, I was a bit worried that the interrail journey planner didn't show any trains between Aegio and Kiato, which I have already used three times since opening in 2020 with diesel traction, whereas the hourly metre-gauge service from Agios Andreas to ra Rio duly appears. However, the official Hellenic trains website and staff (but no timetables posted) at Patra station confirmed trains were running, I suspect fewer than in the past due to light loadings. Normals are directed to use the mostly motorway bus connections to Kiato.

We (my wife had no choice in the matter) took a local bus to Aegio, dined in the port area where the former metre-gauge line has been retained in the paving, stayed overnight at the quite acceptable Telis Hotel and then walked to Aegio station on an unsurfaced road alongside the new unopened double-track railway where work was in progress and masts erected. A notice informed us that the booking office had closed on 31 May, the clerk probably having died of boredom. Tickets at normal fares could be purchased on the train and indeed we were not offered the over-65 discount, the existence of which I was reminded at Athina on our way back by the young lady politely asking our ages. Our train, a Stadtler unit, arrived late on the platform furthest from the station building, track 2 on the third platform and departed as quickly as physically possible. Some new intermediate stations had opened since our 2023 visit, traffic very light. Plenty of room for capacity expansion with several stations equipped with double track and naturally rusty through non-platform lines. A woman was dutifully sweeping the already clean platform at one of them. Only one person boarded at Diakopto which is now underground directly below the previous metre-gauge tracks.

Returning a few days later we did the normal thing and booked through to Patra via the Kiato bus connection, which meant some good views of the remains of both the metre-gauge and new double-track sections with electrification masts in various stages of fitting out. There are no traces visible in the Patra urban area where, apparently, there will be tunnels.

We took the newly liveried metre-gauge unit to what I thought was its terminus of Agios Andreas on our way to the new port and was more than a little surprised when it continued in the same direction

with passengers on board, some having got off and re-boarded, expecting to have to change trains. A closer look at the timetable showed that, indeed, a change was scheduled; perhaps from a 4-car to 2-car formation, but that a passenger service had re-opened, at least from July, to Kaminia.

[467] Hungary – Debrecen ICs Diverted

These services are currently running via Újszász and using the rare curve towards Nyugati at Rákos. Only Flirt/Kiss EMUs on IRs are serving Ferihegy Airport stop from Debrecen.ű. This diversion is expected to continue until 30 November.
https://www.mavcsoport.hu/mav-szemelyszallitas/belfoldi-utazas/vaganyzar

[468] Italy – Roma - Napoli Unscheduled Diversion via Classic Line

On 26 September 2025 Frecciarossa 9587 (10:00 Torino Porta Nuova to Salerno) was running approximately on time on the Roma – Napoli high-speed line south of Roma when it came to a halt. Eventually there was an announcement that there was a line problem and the train would be diverted via the Roma – Napoli classic line.

According to what I have read on EGTRE this meant these two connections were used:

- P.M. Anagni – Morolo (Bivio Sgurgola)
- Fontanarosa-Cervaro (Rocca d'Evandro deviatoio diramazione AC/AV) – Bivio Cassino Sud

This corresponds to what I was able to see on the ground. Re-joining the high-speed line was not a quick process. The train stopped for a long time on an embankment above a busy motorway and another announcement told passengers that "technical controls of the train" were needed. Arrival at Napoli Centrale was about 90 minutes late and members of staff were on the platform to hand out "courtesy packs" containing bottled water and snacks.

[469] Italy – Sicily Query from a Member

(BLNI1481.442) Two replies to this query have been received. Thanks to the members who submitted these:

- The circumetnea.it website is in general user-unfriendly, but after scrolling through the various timetables (the RRB to Paterno is at the very end of the bus timetable pdf, not in the rail section - whereas the new RRB Linguaglossa – Riposto is in the rail section.... I came across this (new?) graphic which tells you the necessary:
  https://www.circumetnea.it/come-utilizzare-la-linea-ferroviaria-partendo-da-catania/

- I travelled on the Circumetnea in July 2022. It was then starting from Borgo Station, a few km out of town but easily accessible by Metro from the centre of Catania. Ball (2016 edition) has Catania Centrale to Nesima as UE, presumably implying the introduction of more modern haulage than the elderly DMUs on the Circumetnea. Leaving the narrow gauge train at Giarre, a kilometre or so before the terminus at Riposto, connects, and always has done, much better with the Messina to Catania main line services.

[470] Italy – TGV Diversion to Torino Porta Nuova

On 24 September 2025 TGV 9255 (Paris Lyon to Milano Porta Garibaldi) came to a halt just outside Torino. The cause turned out to be pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had blocked the tracks at Torino Porta Susa, where the train was due to call. Eventually the train was diverted to Torino Porta Nuova where everything seemed very quiet and police were escorting passengers out of the station via a side entrance.

[471] Norway – Rauma Railway

We've recently returned from a cruise up and down the coast of Norway, which gave us a few stops with railway interest along the way.

I will start with the 07 October call in Åndalsnes, which should have offered a lot of the passengers a ride on "The Golden Train" to Dombås and back on the Rauma Railway. The excursion had been cancelled some while back due to line closure.

When our ship, Trollfjord, arrived at the pier, we took note that there was a long train in the siding, and a 2-car DMU at the platform. On going down to the platform, it was clear that the DMU was being prepared for departure, although there were no passengers to be seen. (DMU Front 93.07, side NOR 95 76 0593 007-3) (Train engines - side numbers 92 86 0101 4519 and NRFAB 92 76 0311 461-6). We walked along for photos, and whilst we were on the platform, the DMU departed. The station display board advised that all trains were cancelled due to a landslide, but services would resume on 08 October - tomorrow!

On enquiry at the station, I was told that the landslide had happened on 17 July (though internet sources said it was 19 July), and the trains had been stuck there since that date. The DMU had just been released to go back to the depot for servicing.

We decided to go on the cable car up the nearest mountain, Romsdal, (which we discovered is 87 metres higher than our own mountain, Snaefell - 708 metres v 621 metres). The gondola gave us some good views over the port and railway station.

During the afternoon, we saw a light engine arrive at the station. It went through, then back into the siding to the head of the parked "Golden Train", then back, apparently testing the tracks and pointwork. The number on its side was SMV2 99 769 162.002-2. It stayed for a while next to the station building, and left a while later.

Some photos of the damage to the track can be found at:
Landslide at Verma, Raumabanen | High up in the mountains on… | Flickr

[472] Poland – PKP to Expand Warszawa - Otwock Line to Four Tracks

Polish infrastructure manager PKP PLK has confirmed that it will proceed with a construction contract to modernise the Warszawa Wawer – Otwock section of the Warszawa – Lublin main line, the final contract to update the key corridor.

Work will include the addition of two new tracks on the 15 km section of line, which will separate long-distance from commuter trains on the route, boosting capacity and service reliability. Eight stations will also be modernised: Warszawa Anin, Warszawa Międzylesie, Warszawa Radość, Warszawa Miedzeszyn, Michalin, Józefów, Otwock, Świder and Warszawa Falenica. Modern passenger information systems will be installed at each station, which will also be adapted to meet the needs of passengers with reduced mobility. In addition, 20 new underpasses will be constructed at the stations to improve safety and accessibility while the existing crossing at Warszawa Falencia station will be rebuilt. Four level crossings will also be eliminated on the section.

The contract is worth zł1.4bn (€330mn) and is being funded under the European Funds for Infrastructure, Climate and Environment 2021-2027. PKP PLK says that preliminary work on the project began at the start of 2025 and that it plans to complete work by 2028.

Upon completion, journey times between Warszawa and Lublin will be reduced to around 1½ hours down from 1¾ hours today. PKP PLK has already completed work to track double the Otwock – Pilawa section, and rebuild the Pilawa – Lublin stretch.

[473] Poland – Warszawa Diversions in November and December

From 04 November to 03 December, 16 services are diverted from Warszawa Gołąbki to Warszawa Zachodnia via line 20. The diversion will be in use again from 08 to 12 December but with only five trains involved.

This diversion is to permit platform works and passage digging at Warszawa Ursus Północny on the normal route. Warszawa Ursus Północny: Platform 2 ready, the first closed as of today - Rynek Kolejowy

[474] Portugal – Lisboa Funiculars

Following on from the dreadful crash on 03 September, a report has been published which effectively says that the cable in use was not fit for purpose. All Lisboa funiculars were closed pending review, and "Investigators recommend that none of the funicular tramlines be re-opened until a new regulatory and safety framework is drawn up." See article at:
Report reveals safety failings that led to deadly Lisbon funicular crash

[475] Serbia – President Inaugurates Rebuilt Main Line

Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vučić, travelled in the inaugural train on 03 October to mark the commissioning of the rebuilt Novi Sad – Subotica line for 200 km/h operation, which forms part of the Beograd – Budapest main line. China Civil Engineering and China Railway 11th Bureau were jointly awarded a contract in 2021 to reconstruct the 108 km line from Novi Sad via Subotica to Kelebia over the border in Hungary and work started in 2022.

The project involved the reconstruction and modernisation of the junctions at Novi Sad, Vrbas and Subotica, the elevation of the railway at intersections with roads and pedestrian and cycle paths to eliminate level crossings, electrification, track doubling throughout and the installation of ERTMS. More than 120 new structures have been built including four bridges and two viaducts with a total length of 2330m, five tunnels, 15 underpasses, and 27 overpasses. For the first time in Serbia, three so-called eco-ducts have been constructed, each 46m long, which will allow animals to safely cross the railway.

The Chinese contractors say that this is the first project in Europe to use Chinese railway technology independently developed and certified according to the European Union Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI).

Only 35 km of the old 183 km Beograd – Novi Sad – Subotica line was double track and the average speed on the line was just 45 km/h resulting in a journey time of 4 hours 35 minutes. Following reconstruction of the line for 200 km/h operation, the Novi Sad – Subotica journey time has been cut to 42 minutes and the trip from Beograd to Subotica now takes 1 hour 20 minutes.

The southern section of the line, from Novi Sad to Beograd had already been rebuilt. "In the three and a half years since it was put into regular passenger rail traffic, around 12.5 million passengers have travelled on the section of the high-speed railway between Beograd and Novi Sad," Serbian Railways Infrastructure (IŽS) says.

"We need to start negotiations on the construction of a railway line from Beograd to Niš and we are also negotiating with our Chinese friends about the Valjevo – Vrbnica route to Montenegro," Vučić said. He emphasised the importance of building the entire network, not just individual lines. He also said there is no need for all these lines to be high-speed as some of them will be for regional services.
"We are now working to secure money for the construction and reconstruction of the railways between Pančevo, Opovo, Zrenjanin and Kikinda, as well as Subotica and Sombor and the connection with Vrbas," Vučić said.

[476] Spain – High-Speed Construction Contract Awarded

Spain's High-speed infrastructure manager Adif AV has awarded a €283.3mn contract to undertake civil works on a 7.9 km section of the Antequera – Granada high-speed line. The name of the winning bidder was not disclosed.

The Genil Valley contract covers the longest and final section of the Loja Bypass, with several major structures including the 1295m Cerro de los Limones Tunnel and a 794m viaduct over the River Genil and the A92 motorway. There will also be a 693m viaduct over the River Salar and the A4155 road, as well as five road bridges over the new alignment and two underpasses.

Adif AV says that it has worked with the Andalucía regional government to protect the site of the Roman villa at Salar, where specific measures will be taken to minimise the impact of construction on this archaeological site. Other measures will be taken to protect the environment during construction. The double-track Loja Bypass runs for a total of 19 km to the south of Loja, with one-third of the new alignment in tunnel or on viaduct. Civil works have been divided into four sections, including the 3.2 km Riofrío section where work began last year under a contract worth €49mn. Work on the 6.3 km A92 section began earlier this year, under a contract worth €48.7mn. Civil works have been completed on the section comprising the new viaduct over the conventional Bobadilla – Granada line.

Also on the Antequera – Granada high-speed line, Adif AV has called tenders for a contract worth up to €9.6mn to supply over 80,000 sleepers to lay a second track along the 46 km single-track section between Archidona and Riofrío. Tendering is also underway for a contract to supply 220,000 tonnes of ballast, worth up to €8.5mn. The contract to undertake tracklaying will be tendered shortly, Adif AV says, with design in progress for overhead electrification equipment. Once this work is completed, double track will be in service on 82 km or two-thirds of the Antequera – Granada high-speed line.

[477] Spain – Vilecha Gauge Changer Back In Use

Following the completion of engineering work in the area, the Vilecha gauge changer is back in use so trains between Madrid and Asturias will no longer need to perform a double reversal south of León.
https://www.adifaltavelocidad.es/-/adif-av-avanza-despliegue-segunda-via-lav-leon-asturias-reabre-cambiador-vilecha?pageFromPlid=203

[478] Switzerland – Six Rare Connections on One Tour

The full route for the RTC charter for Saturday 22 November has now been defined and is longer than initially expected:
https://www.railwaytouring.net/pocket-crocodiles--sulzer-diesels-and-electric-giants

It will cover no less than six rare track elements. These will all be done loco-hauled. They are:

- Balsthal to Balsthal Papierfabrik (the roughly 450m long industrial extension beyond Balsthal passenger station)
- Oensingen OeBB station to Oensingen SBB station link (this requires a shunt west of OeBB station into the local freight yard)
- Brugg western avoider (also known as the Brugg "Flyover" since it is on elevated track and bypasses Brugg station to the west)
- Birr to Mägenwil north to east curve, the newest part of the SBB national network
- Zürich Altstetten to Zürich Oerlikon direct link (Zürich HB western avoider)
- Baden Oberstadt (with continuation westward to Aarau)

[479] Switzerland – Zürich - Winterthur Expansion Approved

Switzerland's Federal Office of Transport (FOT) has granted planning permission for the project to widen the Zürich – Winterthur main line to four tracks and to build a new 9 km tunnel that will help to improve capacity and journey times on one of the busiest sections of the national network.

The Brüttener Tunnel will form the central section of the upgraded line, connecting Bassersdorf and Dietlikon in the south to its northern portal at Tössmühle near Winterthur. The project aims to ease congestion on the existing line via Effretikon, which is currently operating at full capacity, enabling faster long-distance services and more frequent regional connections, improving reliability and cutting journey times.

Once completed, the project will provide continuous four-track operation between Zürich and Winterthur. Additional grade-separated junctions in Wallisellen, Dietlikon and Winterthur are also planned to further enhance network efficiency.

The project includes significant upgrades to local infrastructure. The stations at Winterthur-Töss, Dietlikon, Bassersdorf and Wallisellen will be partially rebuilt and made wheelchair-accessible.

Public consultation on the project was held in June 2023, attracting more than 200 objections. The FOT reports that the majority of these have since been resolved. Under Swiss planning law, objectors have 30 days to appeal the FOT's decision to the Federal Administrative Court. If no appeals are lodged, Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) will finalise the construction programme. Preliminary construction is expected to start in early 2026, with the new infrastructure scheduled to enter service in 2037. The total cost of the project is estimated at SFr 3.3bn (€3.57bn), based on 2014 prices. The Swiss Parliament approved the project in 2019 as part of the Rail Expansion 2035 programme.

REST OF THE WORLD

[480] Canada – Dedicated Tracks for Toronto - Kitchener Passenger Trains

The Ontario government has reached an agreement-in-principle to purchase land from freight railway Canadian National to enable it to construct dedicated tracks for GO Transit passenger train services on the route between Toronto and Kitchener.

The government is to purchase 20.9 km of land within CN's Halton subdivision, enabling it to build infrastructure between Bramalea and Kitchener. The Kitchener Extension Project includes 40 km of track, re-alignments, signal upgrades, bridge work and platform expansion.

Meanwhile, GO services on the Kitchener Line will be increased from 23 November, with 18 additional weekend trips between Bramalea and Toronto Union to provide a train every 30 minutes. Four existing weekend trips will be extended from Mount Pleasant to provide weekend services to Kitchener.

[481] China – Doing Things by Numbers - China's Ticketing Journey

Last year, more than 4.3 billion passenger journeys were made on China's railway network and almost every ticket was purchased using China Railway's (CR) digital ticketing platform, the largest in the world. Passengers can buy online or using an app, add themselves to waiting lists for tickets that have not been released yet, book and pay for on-board meals and other services, apply for refunds, and manage changes, and much more.

With 11.8 million tickets sold on average every day, the system keeps revenue flowing, and trains filled with happy passengers. It has over 700 million registered users and during peak hours issues more than 1000 tickets per second. It has been at the vanguard of China's railway development in the high-speed age, and it would be impossible to run the railway without it.

China's rail services have long held one thing in common with other countries' systems - the need for passengers to hold a valid ticket for an allocated seat or berth. This means that the number of tickets available for any particular train is limited to the number of seats or berths on-board, plus a small percentage of standing-only tickets.

As late as the 1990s, cardboard tickets were the norm, with each station having an allocation of these for a particular service. Tickets were purchased in person, either at the station ticket office or at one of the handful of city-centre ticket offices in the major cities. Queues were often long, and tickets difficult to obtain. Ticket touts were a common sight, milling about in ticket offices and offering tickets they had purchased to potential customers in full view of the authorities.

In 1997, the then Ministry of Railways started to develop computer-based ticketing systems, and within a few years an internal electronic system was in use, with tickets printed out on paper rather than physically allocated to ticket offices. However, it was still necessary to visit a ticket office to purchase a ticket.

The first iteration of a passenger-facing online ticketing system came into operation in June 2011. It had taken 10 years to develop and was reported to have cost over ¥300mn (€36.25mn), although commentators have noted that its cost was not reflected in the ministry's budget at the time, and that the true cost might have been half as much again, or more. The early years were beset with teething troubles, in part because the system was based on technology developed overseas that was unable to

handle the high demand on the Chinese network. On the first day of the 2012 Spring Festival or Chinese New Year, the system was on the verge of collapse with over 1.4 billion visits. As a result, the digital ticketing team at the China Academy of Railway Sciences (CARS), who have led development of the system throughout, worked to restructure the underlying architecture to address concurrent access and operational issues, while keeping the system operating smoothly for public users.

Over the next decade, they developed a new system for passenger records, deployed millisecond-level real-name registration processing technology, and developed their own intelligent scheduling algorithm, all while handling millions of daily visits to the site. They were able to reduce the response time for ticket enquiries from 15 seconds to 0.2 seconds and the passenger verification time to 1.5 seconds.

In November 2013, payment by Alipay - then a relatively new online open platform for payments that is now hugely popular in China - was added to the system to enable secure transactions, and the system's popularity rose. With 11.8 million tickets sold on average every day, the system keeps revenue flowing, and trains filled with happy passengers. In December of that year, a revised and slightly upgraded version of the website was released, along with the mobile version of the site, with the app available for download, further enabling widespread adoption by the general public.

Online booking of pre-packed meals was added in July 2017 for high-speed services, and in October that year, seat selection was added for all EMU services. This iteration was also the first to include a function enabling passengers to view and book connecting trains in advance. Payment by WeChat, one of China's other popular multi-purpose digital platforms, was introduced in November of the same year.

A new version of the website came online in November 2018, which enables users to scan a code to login. Options to buy air-rail tickets combining journeys on China Eastern Airlines, Shanghai Airlines and high-speed rail were added in August 2020. The English-language version of the site launched in November 2020 and supports payment by credit cards issued outside China.

Passenger selection of seats on day trains was introduced in October 2017 and for sleeper berths in July 2023. Full selection of soft and hard berths is available for conventional trains, plus two types of first class sleeping options as well as second class sleepers on EMUs. A loyalty programme was introduced in 2020, allowing travellers to accumulate points that are exchangeable for benefits such as free ticket exchange and on-board food and drink, and the use of dedicated ticket windows at stations. Membership is currently available at ordinary, silver, gold and platinum levels. An online Rail-Boat ticketing service, offering combined train, bus, and ferry tickets for services crossing the Qiongzhou Strait between Guangdong province and Hainan Island in southern China was introduced in November 2021.

Tickets purchased online can be refunded or changed online or at station ticket offices and ticket vending machines and vice-versa. Currently, tickets are released 15 days in advance, but the online platform allows travellers to reserve a ticket on a waiting list for dates more than 15 days ahead and be reasonably sure of success, except for travel in very busy periods.

The modern e-ticket is the customer's copy of the contract between themselves and the railway company. They are entirely electronic and include information from the passenger's identity card for validation, rendering ticket touts (mostly) a problem of the past. Facial recognition is used for passenger verification, especially for ticket inspection at stations, registration online and for password retrieval. 90% of authentication requests are completed within 2 seconds. By the end of last year, the system had issued a total of 18.5 billion e-tickets, saving 15.4 billion paper tickets and ¥100bn (€12bn).

The online team has also developed similar systems for cross-border travel and for railways in other countries built by China. The ticketing systems of the China – Laos Railway, introduced in March 2023, and Indonesia's Jakarta – Bandung high-speed line, have served a total of 47.7 million passengers to

date. Tickets to and from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region are integrated into the mainland system, as are the services themselves.

Luggage and parcels transport is also bookable online and provides station-to-station and door-to-door services, the latter handled by China Railway Express, while hotels and taxis can also be booked on the same platform. Travel insurance for each trip is also available online for a few yuan.

There is an accessible version of the online interface and one specially designed for senior citizens. Vending machines sell tickets at many stations, and tickets can be bought over the phone in some areas. At present, it is still possible to buy tickets in person at station ticket offices, with tickets now resembling very long till receipts and including a QR code for passage through ticket gates. China also offers ticketless travel on a handful of routes in Guangdong province, with passengers using stored value cards such as the Railway e-Card, China Railway Bank Card, and Guangzhou – Shenzhen Railway Peony Card, which allow travellers to make contactless payments.

Passenger services in China are heavily subsidised and many high-speed lines operate at a loss. Ticket prices are fixed and are based on a combination of speed and class, but discounts of up to 20% are sometimes offered to shift hard-to-sell seats. The costs of a trip vary very widely depending on the type and class of accommodation and the speed of the service. A hard seat, a padded bench seat in an open coach, on a conventional service on the 1300 km route from Beijing to Harbin, for example, costs ¥157 (€19) for a journey taking between 10 hours 30 minutes and 14 hours; a comparable second class seat on a faster EMU service on the same route, taking just over 4 hours 20 minutes, costs ¥596 (€72), nearly four times as much. This places per-km costs at ¥0.12 (€0.01) for the hard seat option and ¥0.46 (€0.06) for the economy EMU seat. Travellers with deep pockets can travel to Harbin first class on EMU services for ¥952 (€115), or go business class for ¥1875 (€226.50), where they can enjoy pod-style fully reclining seats; cheaper than a high-speed economy seat, and much more comfortable if you have the time, a hard couchette berth in a six-berth open compartment on a conventional service to Harbin costs ¥269 (€32.50). A soft sleeper berth, one of four in an enclosed compartment, is ¥410 (€49.50), and a bed in a two-berth enclosed compartment is ¥828 (€100).

In comparison, at the time of writing, and searching two weeks ahead, an economy class flight between the two cities costs ¥1800 (€217.50), but tickets can be found for as little as ¥500 (€60.50).

[482] China – New High-Speed Railway Sections Begin Operations

The Shenyang – Baihe section of the Shenyang – Jiamusi High-Speed Railway began operations on 28 September. The line supports a maximum speed of 350 km/h, with 64 train services scheduled daily during its initial phase, including 36 cross-line services. The fastest journey from Beijing Chaoyang Station to Changbaishan now takes 4 hours 33 minutes, while the trip from Shenyangbei to Changbaishan is 1 hour 53 minutes.

The new section forms part of China's 14th Five-Year Plan and creates a direct high-speed link between Shenyang and Dunhua. The route connects Fushun, Tonghua and Baishan to the national high-speed rail network for the first time, reducing travel times between eastern Liaoning, Jilin and the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region. The line is expected to improve transport efficiency, support tourism development, and contribute to broader regional economic and social progress in Northeast China.

Also inaugurated on 28 September, the Xiangyang – Jingmen High-Speed Railway has shortened the journey between Xiangyangdong and Jingmenxi stations to around 29 minutes. The 116-km line, designed for a maximum speed of 350 km/h, connects Xiangyangdong Station on the Zhengzhou – Chongqing High-Speed Railway with Jingmenxi Station on the Wuhan – Yichang section of the Shanghai – Chongqing – Chengdu corridor.

At Jingmenxi, the new route links with the Jingmen – Jingzhou High-Speed Railway and the Wuhan – Yichang section of the Shanghai – Chongqing – Chengdu line which is nearing full operation. At Xiangyangdong, it connects to the Zhengzhou – Chongqing and Wuhan – Xi'an high-speed railways. The new connection enhances the transport network in western Hubei and is intended to facilitate

travel and economic development across the Yangtze River Midstream City Cluster and the wider Central China region.

[483] Hong Kong – Light Rail Voyager Sightseeing Service Expanded

Hong Kong operator MTR Corp has expanded its Light Rail Voyager tourism-oriented services with the introduction of a second route from 28 September.

The *Yuen Long Sightseeing Route* operates on weekends and public holidays, using a branded LRV to take passengers on a journey through Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai. Tickets cost HK$68 (€7.50), including unlimited same-day rides on light rail services and a selection of coupons valued at more than HK$200 (€22). There are discounts at local shops, and on-board staff to introduce key sights such as the Tsui Sing Lau Pagoda.

The newly launched *Yuen Long Sightseeing Route* is designed for individual tourists, families and groups to discover the hidden gems of Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai while experiencing the unique charm of these communities. Additionally, it encourages spending along the journey to support the local economy.

[484] Saudi Arabia – Rail in الرياض (Riyadh): Transforming a Car-Centric City

The city of Riyadh is typically characterised by sprawling highways and a heavy reliance on private cars. However, in recent years, the Royal Commission for Riyadh City (RCRC) has commenced a transformative shift towards mass transport.

The Riyadh Metro is central to the city's transport transformation. Launched in December 2024, the service is helping to redefine urban mobility in the capital, offering a fast, efficient and environmentally friendly alternative to car travel. The network consists of six lines spanning over 176 km and connecting 85 stations, which integrate with bus networks and taxi services. The service offers modern, air-conditioned stations and vehicles, smart ticketing systems and real-time digital journey planning.

In August this year, the Royal Commission for Riyadh City celebrated serving 100 million passengers on the network, highlighting the successful uptake of ridership in the first nine months of service. Passenger data showed that the Blue Line, running along the Olaya Road axis, had been the busiest, carrying around 46.5 million people. Meanwhile, the Red Line, serving King Abdullah Road, carried about 17 million passengers, while the Orange Line along Madinah Road carried 12 million. Aiding this success, the metro recorded a punctuality rate of 99.78% since the start of operations, making it a reliable and effective transportation option for both visitors and residents.

To further extend the reach of the city's Metro network, several expansion projects are currently underway. Earlier this year, a contract to extend Line 2 was awarded to the Arriyadh New Mobility Consortium, which consists of Webuild, Larsen & Toubro, Nesma & Partners, Hitachi, Ansaldo STS, Bombardier, Idom and WorleyParsons. Riyadh Metro Transit Consultants (RMTC), comprised of Parsons, Egis and Systra, will supervise the extension work.

The Line 2 extension will span an additional 8.4 km, with 1.3 km of elevated line and 7.1 km underground. It will serve five new stations: KSU Medical City, KSU West, Diriyah East, Diriyah Central and Diriyah South. The new Diriyah Central will also serve as an interchange with the planned Line 7.

The construction of the new Line 7 is currently in the planning and tendering stages. The line is expected to be 65 km long with 19 stations, 14 of which will be underground. It will link Qiddiya Entertainment City, King Abdullah International Gardens, King Salman Park, New Murabba, Misk City, and Diriyah Gate. The current tender for its design and build runs until 30 November.

Qiddiya High-Speed Rail - In addition to expanding its urban rail network, the Royal Commission for Riyadh City is also developing a high-speed rail line connecting King Salman International Airport, the King Abdullah Financial District and Qiddiya City at speeds up to 250 km/h. The end-to-end travel time between those points is expected to be approximately 30 minutes. In September, 2025, the

Expression of Interest (EOI) phase for this project was launched in collaboration with the National Center for Privatisation & PPP and Qiddiya Investment Company.

Existing Rail Networks - These new developments complement long-standing rail services in Saudi Arabia, such as the East Train service between Riyadh and Dammam, which has been operating since 1981 and remains one of Saudi Arabia's busiest intercity routes. Managed by the Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), the line spans around 450 km and connects Riyadh with Al-Hofuf, Abqaiq and Dammam. To improve service quality and increase capacity on this line, SAR has recently invested in fleet modernisation. In 2024, Stadler signed a contract to supply ten new FLIRT Intercity trains, designed specifically for the Riyadh – Dammam corridor. These trains will enhance passenger comfort with modern interiors, higher seating capacity and advanced safety systems, while also reducing travel times and boosting operational efficiency.

Alongside the East Train, the North-South Railway (the world's longest continuous line at nearly 2750 km) connects Riyadh to the northern mining regions and extends towards Al-Haditha near the Jordanian border. This line provides links between Riyadh, Majmaah, Qassim, Hail, Al-Jouf and Qurayyat. Together, these established intercity routes and the planned rail expansions position Riyadh and Saudi Arabia as pacesetters in advancing rail infrastructure. This drive aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which seeks to modernise infrastructure, reduce congestion and promote sustainable urban growth.

Challenges - Notably, constructing rail links in Riyadh's desert environment has not been without challenges. Engineers have had to find innovative solutions for extreme heat, sandy soil and sprawling urban layouts. For instance, the Riyadh Metro required the installation of specialised cooling and ventilation systems in both trains and stations to maintain comfort in summer temperatures, which often exceed 45°C. Similarly, construction crews had to continuously manage sand infiltration during tunnelling works, with tunnel boring machines equipped with pressurised shields to stabilise loose soil. The city's wide highways and car-centric development also posed engineering hurdles. Building the Blue Line along Olaya Road involved deep underground excavation beneath one of Riyadh's busiest commercial corridors, requiring traffic diversions and careful co-ordination to minimise disruption.

Encouraging Modal Shift - Overall, Riyadh's investment in mass transit demonstrates that even cities long dominated by private car use can transform mobility patterns. The rapid uptake of the Riyadh Metro, the ongoing expansion of its lines and the planned Qiddiya High-Speed Rail illustrate the ambition and the practical progress of the city's transport strategy. Looking ahead, the long-term success of Riyadh's transport transformation will require further integration with buses, pedestrian pathways and park-and-ride facilities, creating an accessible and sustainable network that encourages residents to leave their cars behind.

Through these developments, Riyadh offers a compelling model for other rapidly growing, car-dependent cities seeking to modernise their urban mobility in line with global sustainability goals.

[485] Thailand – Monorail Project Makes Progress

Poramet Ngampichet, Mayor of Pattaya, south-east of the Thai capital Bangkok, says the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed Green Line monorail should be completed by the end of October. Once the assessment has been approved, it will be submitted to Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) for an economic feasibility assessment. The final step will be to obtain approval from the Thai Cabinet.

The 9 km Green Line monorail will run from Pattaya's planned high-speed station via the city centre to Bali Hai Pier. It is planned to implement the project as a public-private partnership (PPP) scheme. The Green Line could form part of a four-line network serving Pattaya. The city council approved the construction of the 11 km Purple Line last year with a view to starting construction in 2027.

The 17.37 km Red Line would run from the Eastern National Sports Training Centre on Chaiyaphruek 2 Road to the Dolphin Roundabout with 10 stations and the Yellow Line would connect Chon Buri and Sattahip.

[486] USA – A Ride on MBTA's South Coast Rail

Usually when passenger service on a rail line is discontinued, it never comes back, but there have been some exceptions. One is the MBTA's South Coast Rail Line, in the shape of the letter "Y," going from Boston to the two outer destinations of New Bedford and Fall River, Massachusetts. The route was historically part of the Old Colony Railroad, and later the New Haven, branching westward from the main (now Amtrak's NEC) at Canton Junction. The old New Haven served New Bedford and Fall River until 1958, and passenger trains on the rest of the Old Colony lines bit the dust shortly after.

On 24 March this year, service from Boston's South Station returned under the auspices of the "T" for the first time in 66 years, with 58 km of track rebuilt. As part of my effort to catch up on all the "new starts" in the United States and Canada, including lines that have returned to service, I rode from Boston to New Bedford on Tuesday 07 October and back from Fall River the next day. Service returned under the MBTA (the "T") as part of Boston's regional rail system, operated by Keolis. The operation is unusual, because of the shape of the line. The operation is not like the Northside Line on Boston's North Shore, where alternating trains go either to Rockport or Newburyport, with essentially "double service" to inner suburbs like Salem and Beverly. Instead every train runs between South Station and either New Bedford or Fall River. Shuttle trains serve the other destination from a transfer station in East Taunton, about a 75 or 80-minute ride from Boston. There are slightly more trains that serve New Bedford than Fall River 15 or 14 on weekdays and seven or six on weekends. Saturday and Sunday schedules are the same. While the operation is interesting, the line is not scenic, and the stations are not placed conveniently for visiting the towns, which are interesting and normally have plenty of things to see and do.

The current line is not the original route to New Bedford and Fall River. Rather it is a longer line where service is operating for several years on a temporary basis. There are presently unfunded plans to restore services in the future through Easton and Taunton on the former line that was abandoned south of Stoughton, which is two stops south of Canton Junction. In the meantime, the trains now run on the former Middleborough – Lakeville Line, on newly upgraded track the rest of the way to the transfer point and the destination cities on the New Bedford Main or Fall River Branch from Myrics Junction. The route to Fall River essentially follows the original 1846 route of the Old Colony & Fall River RR.

Passenger trains were absent from the entire Old Colony system (except between Providence and Boston, which is now part of the NEC) from 1959 until the present Kingston (and also a short branch to a Plymouth station that was not close to the centre of town) and Middleborough – Lakeville Lines opened for restored service in 1997. Because of local opposition and other issues, the Greenbush Line did not get new passenger service for another ten years. The South Coast routes extend the former Middleborough – Lakeville Line and run on it as far as Middleborough. Today the Lakeville station is used only for the seasonal *Cape Flyer* train to Hyannis on summer weekends, although there has been talk of running peak-commuting trains as far as Buzzards Bay, just short of the Cape Cod Canal and the famous lifting bridge that carries the *Cape Flyer* and local freight trains over the canal.

From South Station, the trains run along the right-of-way of the Red Line subway on a surface-running segment through Quincy to Braintree. They do not serve Back Bay Station. The only current station located in a downtown area is Brockton, although the Bridgewater station is within walking distance of downtown and Bridgewater State, the local college. The next stop after Middleborough is East Taunton, where cross-platform transfers are available. I rode the 06:45 departure, the first train of the morning. It was bound for Fall River, so it was necessary to change trains for New Bedford.

The ride between Boston and the outer ends is scheduled to take roughly 1¾ hours, although my train was not due into New Bedford until 08:47. The trainset that was supposed to leave Boston consisted of both single-level cars (two types) and double-deck cars, a mix found only on the T. Due to mechanical issues, all passengers were sent to an all double-deck unit on a different track, which delayed our departure by 15 minutes. Still, there was enough slack in the schedule that we arrived at New Bedford at 08:43. On the way there, there is a station at Church Street, in the northern part of town.

A feature that the destinations have in common is that the railway stations are not located in convenient places. The New Bedford station is about a half-hour walk north of the city centre. The mapping software on my tablet directed me to walk along Acushnet Avenue, a grimy industrial street named after the river that flows through the town. It might have been a better idea to walk across a new bridge from the station and over a wide highway to Purchase Street, and take a bus the rest of the way. The Fall River station is also located some distance north of downtown. There is a boardwalk and bike-and-walking trail along the waterfront that goes to the station, but there are presently no wayfinding signs, so access is tricky. There is a proposal to extend the line to Battleship Cove in the future.

Because I was booked to go home on Amtrak train 179 (19:47 form South Station), I had to catch the 16:41 train from Fall River. It ran through to Boston and connected with a shuttle from New Bedford. Part of the line through Fall River is elevated, so it's possible to get a last look at the town on the way to Boston, including a brief glimpse of the ships in Battleship Cove on the waterfront. There is one station between Fall River and the East Taunton transfer station: Freetown, about a ten-minute ride inbound. Freetown is the home of a large nature park, but it is not visible from the train.

For this writer, the ride back was a good way to learn more about the railroad from Assistant Conductor Aden Walker, a second-generation railroader, whose father is an engineer on the system. He pointed out the interlockings, stretches of single track, and other features of the route as we rode. There are four callouts needed to dispatchers on different parts of the route, ending with Terminal Dorchester, which covers all Amtrak and local trains that serve South Station, as well as other services. Our train was running against the flow of the commuter peak, and we had six meets along the way. Most of the route is rated for 127 km/h, but with a 50 km/h restriction at Bridgewater. We arrived at South Station at 18:23. Part of the fun during the ride was learning about the route from a young railroader who was following a family tradition and looking forward to a long career on the rails.

The fare between Boston and either New Bedford or Fall River is $12.25 (€10.55) each way, $6.00 (€5.15) for seniors and people with disabilities. There is a lot to see in both cities, and it's not necessary to take the train to East Taunton and transfer to a train going to the other destination. The Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) runs local buses in both cities, with a route between them that runs local service and express buses that run on the highway and take 25 minutes between the two downtown terminals. Buses run until about 21:00 on weekdays, but only from mid-morning until late afternoon on weekends.

[487] USA – Amtrak Mardi Gras Service

This new Amtrak service between New Orleans (Louisiana) and Mobile (Alabama) was travelled on 14 October 2025, just under two months after the service restarted with the first public trains on 18 August. The route was previously part of Amtrak's Sunset Limited route from Los Angeles to Orlando, until the track was damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and despite the resumption of through freight traffic the following year the through train has terminated at New Orleans since. The new service comprises two trains each day, leaving New Orleans at 07:35 and 17:31 with departures from Mobile timed at 06:30 and 16:30 with journey times of around 4 hours, making a day trip feasible to either place. We had a day trip to Mobile from New Orleans and the return tickets booked the previous day were $45.60 (€39.20) each in coach class. The train comprised three single deck coaches

top and tailed by diesel locomotives as there are no run round facilities at Mobile. Mobile station comprises a simple siding branching from the through freight route, similar to Ashington in the UK. Although the journey is slow by UK standards, the train has good WiFi and there are interesting views of wetlands and the Gulf Coast as the train travels 233 km, calling at Bay Saint Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula en route to Mobile. As the train enters Mobile there are (currently) good views of the scrapped SS United States, which is being stripped before being sunk to form an artificial reef. Mobile is an interesting place to visit with a good museum and French quarter and a far less frantic feel than central New Orleans. The USS Alabama is also moored nearby as a floating museum. Whether the passenger service will be restored any further east is uncertain but in the meantime this journey makes a worthwhile addition to a holiday in New Orleans.

Reference: USA by Rail (9th ed.) by John Pitt, pub. Bradt (2019). This edition does not include the Mardi Gras service which started after its publication, but a new edition is due in February 2026. It is an excellent resource for planning and undertaking rail trips in the USA.

[488] USA – Honolulu Opens Second Section of Metro

Honolulu inaugurated the second section of its Skyline elevated automated metro on 15 October. The 8.5 km extension runs southeast from Hālawa via the airport and Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam to Kahauiki with four new stations. The opening ceremony was attended by Honolulu Mayor, Rick Blangiardi, Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transit (HART) executive director and CEO, Lori Kahikina, and Hawaii Department of Transportation Services director, J Roger Morton. Passenger services started on 16 October. To celebrate the opening, free travel was offered on 18-19 October on the full Skyline route which now has 13 stations.

Skyline has been equipped by Hitachi Rail which is responsible for supplying the rolling stock, GoA4 automatic train control system, traction power supply, communications, supervisory control and data acquisition (Scada) and platform screen door systems. Hitachi Rail also operates and maintains Skyline, which is the first fully automated metro in the United States.

HART awarded a $US1.66bn (€1.43bn) design and construction contract to Tutor Perini in August 2024 for the 5 km Segment 3. Work on the extension started in August 2025 and it is expected to be completed by 2031. This will add eight stations to Skyline and extend it southeast from Kahauiki to Kalia.

[489] USA – New Rail Services to Run Between Albany and New York City

Metro-North to Run to Albany for the First Time - Under the plan, Metro-North will extend its Hudson Line beyond Poughkeepsie for the first time, linking New York City directly with the state capital. One round trip per day is scheduled to begin in early 2026, with test trains running later this year. The new route will fill service gaps left by Amtrak suspensions and give commuters and visitors another option for travel along the Hudson Valley. The expansion also marks a symbolic return for passenger services on a line once operated by the New York Central Railroad, which last ran between Grand Central and Albany in 1967.

Amtrak Restores Trains and Caps Fares - Amtrak will resume one daily round trip between Albany–Rensselaer and Penn Station from 01 December 2025, reinstating trains 235 and 238 that were cancelled earlier this year. The company will also cap coach fares at $99 (€85) between Albany and New York to make tickets more affordable.

[490] Vietnam – Light Rail Project Gets Green Light

The People's Council of An Giang province in southern Vietnam approved Phase 1 of a light rail project on Phú Quốc Island on 24 October. The public-private partnership (PPP) project is expected to cost ₫9 trillion (€293mn). The line will be about 17.7 km long with between five and seven stations, plus a depot. The LRVs will have between three and five sections with a design speed of 70-100 km/h.